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Depression in the Elderly: Primary Care Practice Fact Sheet #2

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DEPRESSION IN THE ELDERLY

PRIMARY CARE PRACTICE FACT SHEET #2

Depression is the most common psychiatric disorder seen in individuals over the age of 65. It is estimated that at least one million of the nation's 31 million people age 65 and older suffer from major depression, and an additional five million have depressive symptoms severe enough to necessitate treatment.

- The incidence of depression among community-dwelling individuals over the age of 65 is anywhere from 10 to 15% and rises sharply among institutionalized individuals, to 25-30%.
- The National Institute of Health (NIH) Consensus Statement indicates only about 10% of the older adults needing psychiatric treatment ever receive such service.
- Depression is a major source of both morbidity and mortality, resulting in impaired functional status, impaired cognition, and suicide.
- Another obstacle to diagnosing depression in the older population is the fact that both patient and physician may incorrectly attribute depressive symptoms to the aging process.
- Expectations of functional ability may be low for this age group, and impairment in functional capacity caused by depression may be overlooked.
- Cognitive impairment frequently accompanies depression and is manifested by poor concentration, impaired short- term memory, and apathy.
- An individual may have difficulty with the Mini-Mental Status Exam, particularly in the areas of object recall, attention, and calculation.
- Suicide risk is higher for elderly white men than for any other age, gender, or racial group.
- Older adults are more successful at committing suicide than younger individuals. Older individuals are alone more, have time to plan their suicide, and when confronted with concurrent medical conditions tend to have more pessimistic views of the future.
- Most older adults who successfully suicide have seen their physician within the previous 48 hours.
- When recognized and treated, clinical depression may be successfully managed in over 80% of cases.

PRIMARY CARE PRACTICE TIPS

The primary care practitioner's best ally in the diagnosis of depression in older adults can be the family caregiver. Family caregivers see and speak to their older relatives on a regular basis. They may be best equipped to observe changes in a loved one's mental health and wellbeing. Husbands, wives, sons, daughters, and other family members who care for older relatives can be the eyes and ears of health care professionals. Together they can partner effectively in identifying and responding to evidence of depression in older relatives.

**For more info call your Area Agency on Aging
1-877-353-3771**

A Joint Project of the Eastern Agency on Aging and the University of Maine Center on Aging in partnership with Aroostook Area Agency on Aging, Senior Spectrum, Rosscare, Norumbega Medical, Horizons Health Services, Indian Township Tribal Health Center, and Bucksport Regional Health Center